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ABSTRACT

This document describes "Stay a Winner," a program designed to reduce the dropout rate at North Pitt High School in Bethel, North Carolina by providing a focused, more meaningful curriculum; improved instructional processes; use of multimedia technology; and an emphasis on multicultural diversity. It is noted that funding for the program has been provided through the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction for 3 years and that funds provide technology equipment and supplies for the program. The target group is identified as at-risk ninth grade students who are placed in classes where cooperative learning and mastery learning are incorporated and where there exists a strong emphasis on improving each student's self-esteem. The program described encourages a routine use of technology in each class, with students having access to a technology center which houses computers, scanners, CD ROM players, and laser disc players. The highlight of the technology center is described as the video communications studio, with equipment allowing students to create multimedia video productions. The production of a North Pitt video by ninth graders, with the cooperation of volunteer peer tutors, is described. It is noted that, since the implementation of the Stay a Winner program, the school's dropout rate, which had been the highest in the system, was reduced by 50 percent. (Author/NB)

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Stay A Winner is a program designed to reduce drop outs at North Pitt High School. Instead of drop outs, we see students staying in school learning skills that will equip them for dealing with challenges and changes of the next century.

Funding for the program has been provided through the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in the form of a $50,000 grant annually for three years. These funds provide technology equipment and supplies for the program.

The target group consists of identified at risk ninth graders. They are placed in classes where cooperative learning and mastery learning will be incorporated and where there exists a strong emphasis on improving each student's self-esteem.

A routine use of technology has been encouraged in each class. Students have access to a technology center which houses computers, scanners, CD ROM players, and laser disc players. The highlight of the technology center is the video communications studio. This equipment allows students to create multimedia video productions. With the cooperation of volunteer peer tutors, the ninth graders produced our first North Pitt Video.

In a school where drop out rate has been the highest in the system, it is indeed an accomplishment to reduce the drop out rate fifty per cent! It has been an exciting opportunity to work with students that traditionally have been viewed as "trouble makers' and watch them mature as they build self confidence and begin to believe that they are valuable and can accomplish great things!

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Ann S. Burden

Introduction

This model is a comprehensive, systematic program that includes the following components: a focused, more meaningful curriculum, improved instructional processes, use of multimedia technology, and an emphasis on multicultural diversity. We believe that a variety of approaches used concurrently, will make a difference.

School Description

North Pitt High School has a current population of 654, 65% black and 35% white, in grades 9 through 12. The school dropout rate in 1992 was 5%, a decrease of 50% over the last three years since the implementation of this program. Fifty-seven per cent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch; 12% qualify for the exceptional children's program; 3% are identified as academically gifted;2% qualify for the National Honor Society; and currently 3.8% are pregnant. Sixty-three per cent of the student population meet Pitt County criteria for identification as at-risk and 8% participate in student leadership development program.

Many of our students have after-school or week end jobs and a large number travel from 15 to 25 miles to and from school daily. These barriers serve to discourage student participation in school-sponsored extracurricular activities; subsequently, school pride is weak. Except for an athletic booster club and parent advisory council, parent involvement is minimal.

Student Identification

At-risk students have been identified by criteria established by Pitt County Schools

(Appendix 1). The current list of 373 students is updated annually. At-risk students have a team of support personnel consisting of a faculty advisor and student assist team member. Because the dropout rate is highest among ninth graders (6%), the program primarily targets these students.

Of the 87 (1991) and 65 (1992) identified at-risk program targeted students, approximately 70 per cent are black. Subsequently, we have included program components which address multiculturalism and learning styles of African American students.

Program Description and Accountability Procedures

Project Initiation

A school-wide logo contest was held, and the winning entry has been depicted on promotional items used for the duration of the project. All faculty members, North Pitt staff, and at-risk students were given a lapel button with the logo and were asked to wear them each Friday (school pride day). Promotional brochures printed by North Pitt graphic arts students were sent to homes of all students and to community and business leaders. Student participation has been perceived as positive, rather than a negative label.

Program Narrative

Goal 1: Increase the level of student motivation and sense of identification with the school as a community.

Strategies:

1. A restructured curriculum - The curriculum has been changed so that it has

these characteristics:

Personalized and meaningful curriculum - The curriculum has included connections between math/science and language arts/social studies. The personalization of the curriculum has been demonstrated by weekly opportunities for counseling sessions between students and faculty advisors and/or counselors. Students have worked in heterogeneous teams learning from and with peers.

A focused curriculum - The curriculum has placed strong emphasis on communication skills, math, science, social studies. A major focus has been on key processes required for job success: critical thinking, problem-solving and information processing.

2. School as a smaller unit - The student/ teacher ratio has been reduced significantly. Class size ranges from 5 to 15. The intention was to create a special community of learners within the larger school.

3. Advisor system - Each program teacher has been an advisor for 8 students. Academic monitoring/counseling has been each advisor's responsibility. A second role of the advisor has been to provide a source of support and encouragement for advisees. The purpose of this system has been to provide a sound foundation for developing a sense of ownership and school bonding among the targeted students.

4. Teaching methods to stress success - Because research shows that higher achievement, increased acceptance of diversity, improved attitudes toward school, and enhanced self-esteem are attainable goals through cooperative learning, the program has made extensive use of this instructional approach.

Instructional techniques have used multimedia technology and have emphasized mastery and depth, rather than superficial coverage. Teachers have access to Macintosh LC computers, printers, scanners, laser discs and CD ROMS.

5. Students' self-esteem - A new course, Experiential Seminar, has been

designed, by the program faculty, to improve self-concept and further develop leadership skills. The faculty has worked with students to create a positive culture - one that values academic achievement, respects the inherent worth of each student; and reinforces the importance of cooperation. This course has been offered in the curriculum through the addition of a class period. Experiential seminar is taught four days weekly and on the fifth week day, students attend homeroom and club meetings.

Goal 2: Develop skills and attitudes of leadership.

Strategies:

1. Experiential Seminar - Experiential Seminar is required for all ninth grade at-risk students. This seminar incorporates activities designed to develop abilities in goal setting, establishing direction to accomplish those goals, responding to temporary set-

backs, and in crisis intervention. Also, it enables students to develop positive self-concepts, expand innovative and thinking skills, improve test-taking skills, and gain expertise in career planning.

2. Curriculum - Courses foster skills and attitudes that are critical to development of leadership. Activities which enhance self-concept are an integral part of the curriculum

Goal 3: Develop skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for career preparation, decision-making, and success.

Strategies:

1. Revised curriculum - Core courses stress the development of transferable

career skills. Identifying problems, using technology to process information, working

effectively in teams and communicating effectively have been emphasized.

2. Technology - Multimedia and video communications technologies allow students to work with large amounts of information in a new, dynamic, highly realistic form. These innovative tools require students to assemble information, synthesize it, and evaluate it prior to decision-making. These skills are in demand by industries, and use of these technologies will enable students to develop and improve these skills through the interaction with laser discs, computer programs and video production equipment.

3. Career development - Seminars enable teachers to assist students to integrate learning, make sense of it, generalize from it, and relate it to their future career goals.

Goal 4: Develop cognitive skills with special emphasis on key concepts, essential processes, and problem-solving abilities.

Strategies:

1. Technology - Multimedia technology has been used as one of the main strategies because it : (1) allows teachers and students to design their own lessons; (2) enlists students as active participants; (3) speaks in imagery - the language of today's youth; (4) has been found to encourage peer teaching/tutoring, thus promoting cooperation and increasing motivation and interest.

2. Restructured curriculum - Core content courses have been reviewed, revised and developed so that they embody the following features: focus on key concepts and skills, emphasize problem-solving and information processing. Because end of course tests contain a great deal of questions on what we consider to be trivial

knowledge, we wrote proposals for waivers from these tests. We were denied the

waivers. This has limited the extent to which teachers are willing to restructure the curriculum.

3. New Assessment measures - Assessment emphasizes the demonstration of competencies. Students' achievement is often determined by how well they perform skills and their improvement, rather than by multiple choice test items alone. Portfolios and cooperative group projects are examples of measures being used.

Goal 5: Increase the support and involvement of parents and the community.

Strategies:

1. A spirit of cooperation - In all relationships with parents and the community, we have emphasized the importance of cooperation and involvement. Several meetings, dinners, and luncheons have been provided for discussions of the program and students' progress. Many businesses have provided motivational and informational speakers, some on a regular basis. However, we continue to attempt to increase parental involvement with the school and the program, because we believe it is vital to the overall success of this and similar programs.

2. Communication - Parent Link, a bimonthly newsletter has been mailed to parents encouraging involvement and publicizing events related to the program. Parents have been contacted by program teachers regularly by telephone and written notes.

Goal 6: Develop improved teaching methods, curriculum learning materials and structural changes that can be used in other professional settings.

Strategies:

1. Video communications - Video communications has provided opportunities for students to produce school news programs, video yearbook, and other multimedia programs. These activities have enhanced public speaking skills, improved self-esteem, and provided encouragement for careers in communications. Presentations for "Stay A Winner" have been created and shared locally, statewide, and nationally.

2. Multimedia technology - Multimedia tools have been used to interconnect text, graphics, animation, video, voice, and sound. Multimedia technology is an innovative teaching tool for both teachers and students. When used in conjunction with cooperative learning, it presents a variety of opportunities for students to integrate problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills,collaborative decision-making skills, and produce a creative product and can be used to motivate and teach peers.

3. Multicultural learning styles - Program faculty attended a two-day workshop, taught by Dr. Claudia Melear on "Multicultural Diversity: African- American Student Learning styles." Faculty and students were tested with the Myers-Briggs Personality Profile and results were correlated with learning styles and appropriate teaching strategies.

4. Dissemination of results - Dissemination of program components through local, statewide, and national presentations has been a major emphasis in 1992-93. Program teachers and the project coordinator have worked with educators throughout the state in an effort to promote the positive outcomes that have resulted from this program.

Summary

The dropout rate for North Pitt High School was 10% in 1990; 5% in 1991, 5% in

1992. This 50% decrease in dropout rate has been brought about over the last two years since the implementation of this program. Through concerted efforts of a dedicated faculty, there has been a difference at North Pitt, not just in statistical data, but in attitudes and student successes.

As we consider the overall program results, we realize that there have been many positive changes. However, we are not satisfied with status quo, we plan to make additional improvements for the upcoming year.

Appendix 1

1 category checked places a student on the watch list §.
2 categories places a student on the certain list •.

Identification of At Risk Students

Homeroom Teacher	CAT 25% or lower	Course Failure 2 or more core subjects	Retentions 2 or more core subjects	Attendance absent 10% or more	Discipline ISS	Teacher Referrals Explain briefly

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